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ABSTRACT

At its national convention, NCTE questioned whether composition can be taught at all. A synthesis of some recent research and theory offers a new perspective from which to analyze the problem and to propose some solutions to it. It suggests that the composing process can be analyzed into its component skills and that these skills can be taught according to known principles of learning. A statement or a communication will result when the composing process is finished. Composition means the act of putting together in coherent relationship. Composing has a perceptual, conceptual and an expressive dimension. These three dimensions tend to be cyclical. A model shows the steps in the process of composing. The first line of steps in the model has a strong perceptual base. Once a focus, however broad, has been selected, progress is dependent upon the individual's ability to perceive ever finer discriminations and associations. Almost simultaneously with the development of perception, a parallel conceptual development must occur. In view of the model presented above, composing is not being taught. Focus on the completed whole has led to ignoring the prerequisite processes. However, if teachers can be led to create appropriate perceptual and conceptual learning situations, it may become possible for composition to be taught. (CK)

"?...*...!"

Or Composition Can Be Taught If...

by Robert E. Shutes

That NCTE should, at its national convention, question whether composition can be taught at all, is both sobering and challenging. It is sobering because it reflects how little progress we have made in decades of strenuous effort to improve the teaching of composition. It is challenging because it suggests a willingness to entertain any reasonable alternative to the methods so far tried.

A synthesis of some recent research and theory offers a new perspective from which to analyze the problem and to propose some solutions to it. It suggests that composition involves more than expression, that the composing process can be analyzed into its component skills, and that these skills can be taught according to known principles of learning. It also suggests that the steps involved in composing are to some degree sequential and that its dimensions interact with each other. As a result, it suggests that the problems of teaching composition match almost one for one the problems of learning to compose.

It was that set of ideas that I meant to suggest in the title of this article. The quotation marks are intended to imply that a statement, or communication, will result when the composing process is finished. What is inside the quotations, however, is meant to suggest that the communication is not generated instantaneously, complete and polished, in a single burst of creative effort. Rather it begins with puzzlement or curiosity (?), which may or may not lead to the discovery of purpose

and insight (*). Even if purpose is identified and an insight gained however, still other obstacles stand between them and successful expression. And once the statement itself is completed (!), it will not necessarily conform to the conventions of written language suggested by all the punctuation marks that make up the title.

Before looking at whether composition can be taught, then, it is necessary to look again at what composition is.

What is Composition?

Composition means "the act of composing," or more precisely, "the act of putting together," or still more precisely, "the act of putting together in coherent relationship." Despite its derivation, however, the connotation of the noun form of "compose" has come to stress the completed product rather than the act of its creation. Whether we talk about reading a written composition or listening to a musical composition, we imply a finished whole. When we discuss the composition of a painting, a photograph, or some chemical product, we refer to the components of an already finished identity.

The consequences of our use of the term "composition" in reference to writing are profound. Robert Zoellner[1] points out quite correctly that it distracts our attention from the act of composing to the completed artifact. Quite logically, this leads us to put our attention

[1]Robert Zoellner, "Talk-Write: A Behavioral Pedagogy for Composition," College English, Vol. 30 (January, 1969), 267-320. See esp. pp.269-270.

on results and outputs rather than on causes and inputs. James Moffett[2] argues that this, in turn, orients us to contents that students learn about rather than to skills that students learn how to use. In short, the semantic charge of the term "composition" prompts our attention to product rather than to process. Perhaps this is why our efforts to improve composition by teaching have failed. We may have been teaching students about composition rather than teaching them how to compose.

To insure that this discussion does not fall into the same trap, let us focus attention at the outset on the process of composing.

What is Composing?

Composing is the process of putting things together in coherent relationship. Note that such a definition does not limit us to verbal expression. Composing can occur in any medium from the simple manipulation of physical objects to the conscious juxtaposition of mental images, from the placing of pigment on canvas to the chiseling of form out of stone, from the sequencing of musical notes to the positioning of people on a stage or playing field. A place setting of silverware can be a composition. The arrangement of furniture in a room can be a composition. A square dance set is a composition. The Power-I and the Wishbone-T formations are compositions. But behind

[2]James Moffett, "A Structural Curriculum in English," Harvard Educational Review, Vol. XXXVI (Winter, 1966), 17-28. See esp. pp. 19-20.

even such mundane joinings of things stands the process of composing. How many centuries of trial and error, of change and refinement, did it take to compose the table setting for a banquet? And how many executions and repetitions, modifications and substitutions will it take to compose a pass pattern that cannot be defended against?

As each of the foregoing examples suggests, composing consists of a conscious act that satisfies some purpose. It results in some desired product, but the product can be neither capricious nor accidental and still qualify as a composition. Though fortuitous discovery or sheer serendipity may produce a pleasing combination, without conscious choice, it is at best a coincidence. Therefore, the act of composing must somehow be prompted or motivated. Whether he is faced with a multiplicity of spontaneous stimuli or confronted with a specific task, the individual composer must be motivated by internal curiosity or need, prompted by the arrangement of cues, or moved by the desire to imitate or communicate if a composition is to result. It will be well to keep this dimension in mind when we consider our past practice in the teaching of composition. In the long run, Moffett[3] is probably right: the ultimate context for composition is somebody-talking-to-somebody-else-about-something. And the motivation may derive from any of the three.

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[3] Ibid., p. 20.

In addition to the aspects so far described, composing has three dimensions: a perceptual one, a conceptual one, and an expressive one. They basically flow in that order, and in doing so, they tend to parallel human development. Moreover, these three dimensions tend to be cyclical, as suggested in Figure 1. Percepts lead to concepts, which, in turn, lead to expression. But the expression, once made, pushes the composer to a closer perceptual look at his subject, a refinement of his interpretation of it, and a change in his expression about it. As a matter of fact, these three dimensions of learning seem to be so inextricably intertwined that, after some minimal point, perceptual, conceptual, and verbal learning are mutually reinforcing and therefore mutually prerequisite to improvement in composing.

Figure 1.

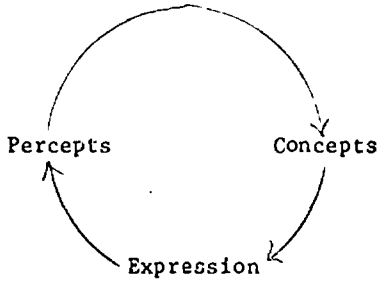
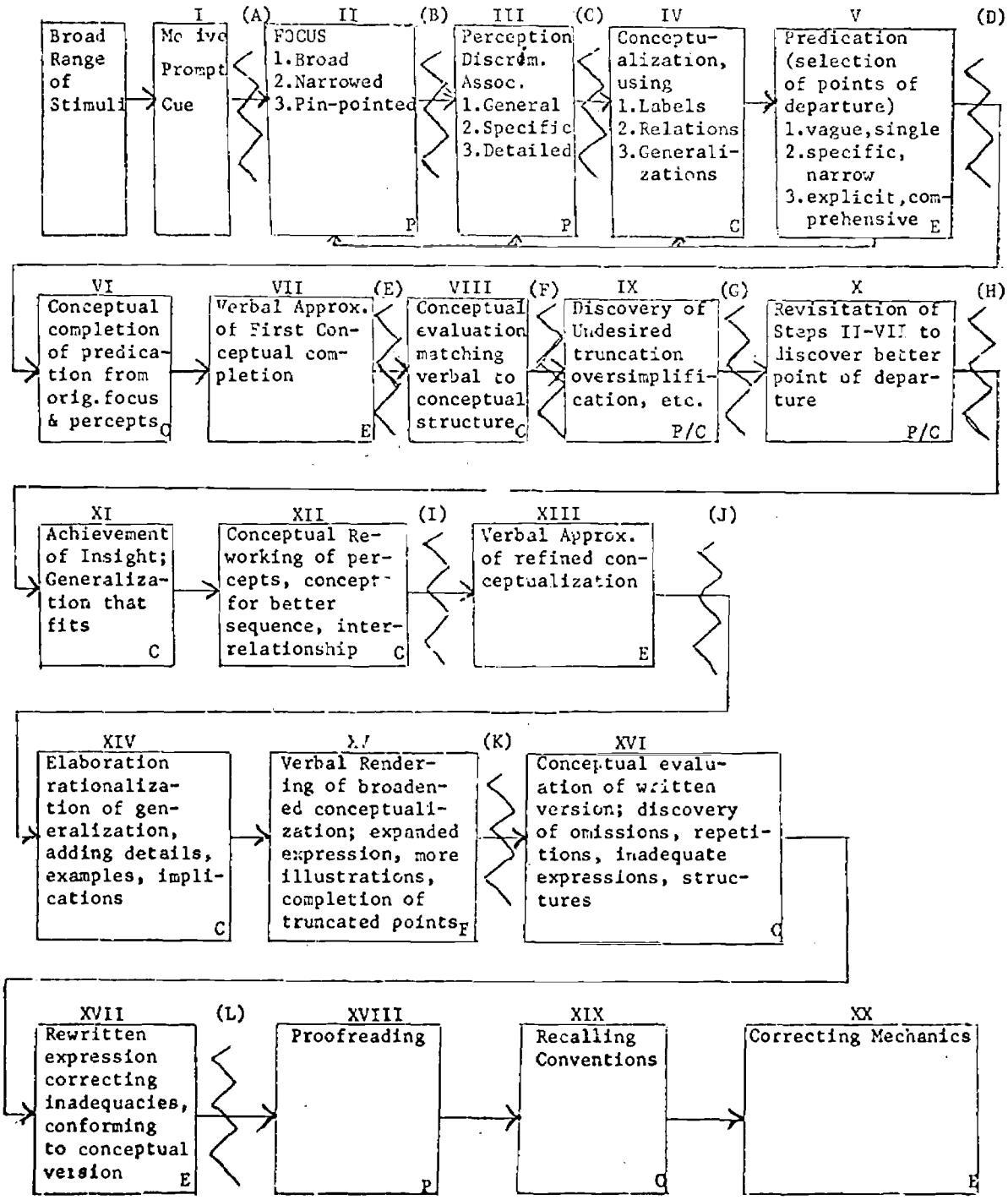


Figure 2 suggests some of the steps through which the process of composing must go. Let it be said at the outset that the steps are more theoretically than empirically conceived, though some of them have their roots in research on verbal learning and the rest are certainly related to practical experience. Each line is intended to imply a developmental

Figure 2
Some Possible Steps in the Process of Composing



level, while each jagged divider suggests a point of difficulty which some students may not pass. The first 7 steps indicate a common achievement level for the first six grades. Steps 8-13 represent an ideal achievement level for the second six grades. Steps 14 and 15 represent the highest level achieved by most college students, while steps 16-20 are achieved by only a favored few at any level. It is interesting to note that of the 20 steps suggested, only six fall into the expressive dimension of composing.

The first line of steps in the model has a strong perceptual base, for refinement of perception is the composer's fundamental task. From the broad range of stimuli that usually impinge upon him, his fundamental step is to select those stimuli to which he will attend or on which he will focus. To do that successfully, he needs to feel a strong internal motive or be assisted by some external prompt or cue. Without such assistance, the composer is paralyzed, and he utters that all too familiar statement: "I can't think of anything to write about." Basic to instruction in composing, then, is the provision of prompts to many possible centers of focus, the provision of many strong stimuli, and the reinforcing of all gestures towards focus.

Once a focus, however broad, has been selected, progress is next dependent upon the individual's ability to perceive ever finer discriminations and associations. According to Miller,[4] the number of

[4]George A. Miller, "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on our Capacity for Processing Information," Psychological Review, Vol. 63 (1956), 81-97.

simultaneous discriminations people can make ranges from five to nine with the average falling at seven. Beyond that number the individual must group his discrete perceptions into larger categories in order to handle them. For the young child, the successful discrimination of two to five percepts is a significant accomplishment. The older child will need prompts to discover higher order categories in which to group larger numbers of perceptions.

Almost simultaneous with the development of perception, a parallel conceptual development must occur. According to Vygotsky,[5] concept development is strongly dependent upon verbal development. That is, in order for a concept to become a useful abstraction, it needs to find embodiment in language. Thus, the building of vocabulary is equally as important as the development of perceptual skills, for without words to describe or name perceptions, the composer is stopped at Point C on the model. He cannot express what he perceives. If he has the beginning concepts and the language to go with them, he may then take Step 5 and make some kind of statement about what he has perceived. And this, in turn, presupposes some basic familiarity with word order, which is itself the product of innumerable perceptions.

Steps 2 through 5, from focus through predication, can and probably must be repeated many times at increasingly precise and therefore more complicated levels of performance. The first-grader may say: "We went

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[5]Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, Thought and Language (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 33-51.

to the zoo." The third-grader may say: "We went to the zoo and saw the animals." A sixth-grader may attain: "Last Thursday we visited the zoo to look at the differences between the many animals and birds." In these basic starting statements one can see a refinement of focus from broad to pinpointed and a refinement of statement from vague to explicit and comprehensive. One can also see the growth in perceptual and conceptual skills that lead toward the ability to generalize.

It is important to note that the nature of these opening statements determines what direction succeeding statements will take, and how far they will go. The young child who says: "We went to the zoo," has told his whole story at once. Without prompts, he has nothing else to say. The child who says: "We went to the zoo and saw the animals," can talk about the trip and the animals. By contrast, the sixth grader's statement: "Last Thursday our class visited the zoo to look for differences between the many animals and birds there," has opened the way for himself to discuss at length the differences he discovered, and, in the process, to name all the animals he saw. Thus, the capstone learning in Line 1 would be the discovery that certain opening statements encourage further composing while others discourage it. The child who fails to make that discovery may be stopped at Point B. When he has written one sentence, he has said about all he is able to say.

Two last comments need to be made about the steps in Line 1. First, Moffett suggests a potentially powerful way of building the perceptual and conceptual skills which stand behind fruitful initial

predication. It is the exploration of "all the relations that might exist between the student and a subject, and between him and a speaker or listener."[6] Developing such a flexibility of perspective through role-playing should promote essential perceptual sensitivity. Second, the refinement of the perceptual process should influence the balance students achieve between their center of focus and the remainder of their perceptual field. When their focus includes the whole field, as it seems to in young children, it proves too overwhelming to say much about. If the focus is too close, important relationships between the subject and other dimensions of the field are ignored, and predication is limited in a different way. Only when a balance between the center of focus and the surrounding objects or ideas is achieved are the relationships open to exploration and statement. As Moffett suggests,[7] achieving such a perceptual fluency requires many experiments with different roles and relationships; therefore, we must insure that motivation continues and that students are encouraged rather than discouraged until the experimenting is complete.

The second level of difficulty begins with Step VIII and proceeds through several possible barrier points to Step XIII. It begins with

[6] Op. Cit., p. 24.

[7] Op. Cit., pp. 23-26.

the conceptual evaluation (Step VIII) of the development implicit in the initial predication and its translation into verbal expressions (Steps VI and VII). That expression customarily fails to carry fully the details and relationships or the conceptual interpretation of them achieved in earlier steps. For the student whose perceptual, conceptual, or language development is still limited, this is nevertheless a significant achievement; for some it may be the ultimate limit of their skill in composing. They deserve reward for their accomplishment and will need reinforcement to keep at the composing process. Those who are ready to go beyond this point will now turn their conceptual powers on their own expression, evaluating how well it matches their perceptual and conceptual grasp of the subject.

From this point on, trouble looms on every hand. It is one thing to perceive that a piece of expression does not say what one intended, but it is quite another to figure out why. Often, it results from the perspective chosen in the initial predication; that is, the writer simply picks the wrong starting point and can never move smoothly from there to the total Gestalt he intends to express. But how subtle a matter this is, involving as it does both perceptual-conceptual content apart from expression and perceptual-conceptual content embedded in expression that has a structure and meaning of its own! Hence, though the student may be aware that his expression is unsatisfactory, he may not be able to determine where the inadequacy lies. If he cannot, he is blocked from improving it. And not until much later in his development is he likely to discover that by experimenting with his expression

he may help himself clarify his thought. For the moment he is through with composing.

If he is able to discover the point of inadequacy, he can retrace Steps II-VII several times in search of a better point of departure. But again, he may or may not succeed in achieving the insight or generalization that can form a fruitful opening predication. If he fails, he is stopped. If he succeeds, he can now reword his conceptualization and, if he has the vocabulary and structures available, rewrite his expression of it, selecting more coherent elements, smoothing their sequence, and including the key relationships between them.

For the vast majority of people, this represents the highest level of development they can (or will) achieve in composing skill. It reflects only two of the four motives Calitri[8] ascribes to human language use, the autistic and the communicative, or the desire to please self and the desire to transfer a thought or feeling to someone else. It is significant that Calitri's other two motives, analytic and aesthetic, can only come into play after this level of skill has been achieved.

The remaining steps (XIV-XX) suggest another cyclical process of refinement of both idea and expression which may finally terminate in a concern for the physical appearance of the completed composition.

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[8] Charles J. Calitri, "A Structure for Teaching the Language Arts," Harvard Educational Review, Vol. XXXV (Fall, 1965), 481-491.

Within this cycle, too, the composer may be able to identify inadequacies conceptually without being able to correct them expressively. Only when he is satisfied on both counts, however, does he have sufficient concern for the details of graphic presentation to bother with proofreading and the correction of departures from convention; prior to that time, he is too preoccupied with the problems of composing itself. Indeed, there is considerable question as to whether proofreading and the correction of mechanical errors have anything to do with the process of composing at all.

To summarize, then, the process of composing involves complex interactions of three dimensions: perceptual, conceptual, and expressive. Rather than being a strictly linear learning process, composing is apparently broken down into approximately three cycles, each of which must be repeated many times until a skill plateau is reached from which it is possible to launch into the next cycle. Whether there are additional cycles beyond those described must remain for the moment a matter of conjecture. Suffice it to say, that even within the third cycle, increasingly higher orders of skill may be achieved. Unless the skill plateaus are attained, however, the student cannot move from the first cycle to the second and the second to the third, and may, in fact, be stopped between steps within any cycle. Many of the skills involved are not embodied directly in expression, but must be developed apart from writing itself. And finally, the whole process is so intricate and demanding that one needs strong motivation to keep at the task.

Can Composing Be Taught?

Having examined some of the dimensions of the composing process, it is now time to examine their implications for teaching. Reflection on the perceptual and conceptual steps in the model, in particular, suggests that the development of composing skill is strongly related to general intellectual development. It may be, as Stephen Judy suggests, "...that writing skill may be developed naturalistically, that writing is something learned through experience rather than through direct instruction."[9] This implies, in turn, that a good share of what we could call teaching in this context will consist of insuring a continual opportunity to amass the perceptual and conceptual experiences prerequisite to expression. Even if composing cannot be taught directly, the teacher can arrange systematically those experiences that will make its development possible.

A second implication we may draw from the obvious complexity of the composing process is a primary need for compelling motivation to keep the learner at the task. This can be developed from within the individual, tapping his curiosity, feeding his pleasure in play, and encouraging his desire to please himself, or it can proceed from outside the individual, in the environment created by the teacher. Interesting paintings, photographs, sculptures, music, or artifacts can be

[9]Stephen Judy, "The Search for Structures in the Teaching of Composition," English Journal, Vol. 59 (Fall, 1970), 213-218.

arranged to engage his attention and prompt practice at perceptual discrimination. Real and simulated situations may be created in which the student explores the dimensions of relationship and practices the language of anger, happiness, curiosity, friendship, strangeness, and countless other feelings and conditions. In this context the power of Moffett's proposal for a dramatic focus in language learning asserts itself.[10] Within the natural structure of dialogue, monologue, and soliloquy, one can explore the many dimensions of the I-you-it relationships by playing the various roles. Thus, he can achieve many critical insights in relative security and with comfortable effort.

If sustaining strong motivation is important, it is equally important that nothing in the teaching-learning situation should discourage involvement or make the task seem too complicated or forbidding. It was, I believe, Jerome Bruner who said, "School should be the safest place to make a mistake." I would add that within the school, the composing class should be the safest place of all! If we evaluate the expression of students who are wrestling with perceptual and conceptual problems on the basis of the mechanical errors their expression contains, we are fundamentally denying the validity of their concerns. Having presented them with one task, we are evaluating them on the basis of a different one. If we ask them to try a new kind of expression in order to learn how to do it, it is not fair to evaluate

[10] James Moffett, A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13: A Handbook for Teachers (Boston, 1968).

them as if they already knew how. In short, we should not evaluate them at Step XIII when they have only attained Step VII. Such responses from the teacher are uniformly discouraging; rather than keeping the student at th. ... and excited about it, they puzzle and frustrate him. A better strategy would be to respond to the message that is there, in a collaborative rather than an evaluative stance, to help the student to identify the points of difficulty, and to suggest better ways of looking or structuring expression.

A third implication suggested by the model is the need for many trials in order for learning to take place. Obviously many of these trials need to occur at the perceptual or conceptual levels rather than at the expressive level. Thus, when we insist that all the trials be undertaken in writing, we build in the physical labor of creating printed products which we know ahead of time must be discarded. To the student, this seems like wasted effort. It is not until one reaches the bottom of the model that he can joyously or at least stoically discard inadequate pieces of writing. Before that level, when we ask a student to discard the fruits of labor we have asked him to undertake, it is as though we kick to pieces the sandcastle we have just encouraged him to build. This fact leads us back again to the utility of the oral component of Moffett's drama based curriculum.[11] We do not associate the same sense of labor with

[11] Ibid.

speaking as we do with writing. As speech is spontaneous, feedback can be immediate and a new trial can follow directly. By substituting oral for written practice, then, we can increase the amount of composing behavior, we can make it safe to make a mistake and possible to try again immediately, and we can avoid the sense of wasted effort. By the same token, the teacher can avoid treating a learning process as if it were a finished product and keep his attention focused on helping the student learn how to compose instead of on extraneous matters like mechanics.

There is still another value to be gained through oral practice. As Robert Zoellner has so aptly pointed out,[12] oftentimes students are better able to speak their thoughts than they are to write them. In discussing what they meant in what they wrote, they are able to make perfectly clear what came out garbled, or with a drastically different meaning, in writing. He suggests that there may be "significant numbers of students who have been taught - or conditioned to - a behavioral pattern of responses to the writing situation which involves the conscious or unconscious dissociation of what the student really thinks on the one hand from what he actually writes on the other."[13] Hence, Zoellner proposes a talk-write rather than a think-write sequence in the composing process. What this really means is a think-talk-write

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[12] Op.Cit., pp. 270-274.

[13] Ibid., p. 273.

sequence, or in terms of the model described above, a rapid series of cyclings through perception, conception, and oral expression preceding a final cycle that leads to written expression.

Within such a situational context, Zoellner brilliantly illustrates the applicability of seven principles of operant conditioning to the composing process.[14] The principles are: 1) concentrate on the individual organism; 2) build from the naive behavioral repertory; 3) work with freely emitted behavior; 4) insure high frequency of response; 5) insure low duration of response; 6) reinforce desired responses immediately, and 7) shape behavior through intermediate specification of purpose. Without attempting to summarize Zoellner's full discussion of the relationship between those principles and the composing process, let me quickly point out their immediate relevance to this discussion. The first principle provides one basis for motivation, individual attention. The second and third prompt us to avoid discouraging students from composing through presenting them with tasks that are beyond them or of no interest to them and instead allowing them to operate spontaneously at the level they are able and with content that is intrinsically motivating. The fourth supports the notion of oral practice as opposed to written since in oral practice we can insure high frequency of responses, whereas in written practice we cannot. The fifth helps us to insure that the investment in a particular response is not too great to discourage students from discarding it. The sixth again favors oral

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[14] Ibid., p. 278ff.

practice since oral responses can be reinforced immediately, while written responses cannot. And the seventh focuses our attention on the shaping of little bits of behavior where the difficulties occur and where learning can take place, and helps us avoid trying to shape many kinds of behavior, such as would be found in a three hundred word composition, for example, simultaneously.

Stress on oral practice leads inevitably to a focus on communication, which can be of itself a strong motivating force for composing. If we are judicious in the selection of learning experiences, oral communication allows us initially to broaden the audience for which the student composes, gives him multiple practical feedback sources for the effectiveness of his communication, and, as a result of both of the foregoing, multiplies his opportunities for practice. Two writers have spoken recently about the motivational value of oral exchange. H. R. Wolf[15] described the power of the group dynamic to overcome individual reticence toward composing. George Elliot,[16] despite his pessimism about the possibility of identifying the components of the writing process, described how a sense of community in a class can promote easy interaction and a kind of communion about common concerns. He also noted the creativity inherent in spontaneous communication, even

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[15]H. R. Wolf, "Composition and Group Dynamics: The Paradox of Freedom," College English, Vol. 30 (March, 1969), 441-444.

[16]George P. Elliott, "Teaching Writing," College English, Vol. 31 (November, 1969), 123-133.

for the teacher. In describing a particularly successful class, he states, "At the moment of talking I was discovering something worth discovering, and I was doing this because of the people I was talking to, for them and for myself at once."[17]

A fifth implication is that responses to individual efforts at composing must relate directly to the focus on which the composition is sighted and to the problems of capturing that focus in language. That is, the teacher should reinforce the exploration of the point of interest and raise questions about the completeness or adequacy of the communication in terms of his understanding of it. In other words, if the statement is too narrow he should ask, "Is your interest really in A, or is it in B?" If the statement is ambiguous, he should ask, "Do you really mean C or do you mean D?" Under no circumstances should he write in the margin "awkward," or "meaning not clear." His response should be a communication to the writer as a receiver of the communication, not as a critic of it. Instead of merely pointing out to the student where a problem exists, a teacher should point out possible solutions to it. Sometimes, this will mean going clear back to the original predication or opening statement; other times, it will mean merely pointing out other development routes the student might have chosen but which he has overlooked.

A sixth implication is that students can learn a great deal about composition from inadequate efforts already completed by other people.

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[17] Ibid., p. 127.

Without having to generate composition himself, he can profit by the mistakes of others. This is, of course, readily brought about in oral exchange, but it can also be done through the study of written products originated by others. The key to profit in this kind of study is the raising of perceptual and conceptual questions inadequately dealt with in the writing sample.

A seventh implication is that teachers need to recognize that students take differential amounts of time to engage in and complete the composing process. To set strict time limits, indiscriminately applied to everyone, is to insure that certain students will not be able to complete the assigned task. This irrelevant constraint may well alter their view of both the reasonableness of the task and of their capacity to respond to it. As a result, their production may reflect considerably less capacity than they have and their self-concept in regard to composing may be diminished when, with more time, it might have been enhanced. In short, physical arrangements allowed for the process of composition must provide for the expression of individual differences.[18]

A last, but certainly not final, implication is that instruction in composing should be completely divorced from instruction in the conventions of written language. In the first place, the written conventions reflect none of the composer's concerns in composing. In

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[18]See Stephen Judy, Op.Cit., p. 216f.

the second place, they distract both the teacher's and the student's attention from the problems of composing. In the third place, they confuse two entirely separate processes, and hence deplete the effectiveness of instruction in each. Finally, they confuse the basis for evaluation, and more often than not, substitute an inappropriate set of criteria for an appropriate and helpful set of audience responses.

The foregoing comments do not begin to include all the specific implications that can be drawn from the model of the composing process presented above. At best, they suggest only some major areas of concern. Hopefully, they will also suggest some fruitful areas for additional exploration and discourage further effort in areas already shown to have little or no value in changing composing habits.

Have We Been Teaching Composing?

The summaries of research by Meckel,[19] Sherwin,[20] and Braddock[21] in the area of composition cumulatively reveal that previous efforts lie largely outside the model proposed in this article. They begin with stress on the teaching of the traditional grammar (which has been repeatedly shown to have little effect on writing), extend into the areas

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[19] Henry C. Meckel, "Research on Teaching Composition and Literature" in N. L. Gage, ed., Handbook of Research on Teaching (Chicago, 1963), 966-1006.

[20] J. Stephen Sherwin, Four Problems in Teaching English: A Critique of Research, (Scranton, 1969).

[21] Richard Braddock, "English Composition" in Robert L. Ebel, ed., Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Fourth Edition, (London, 1969), pp. 443-461.

of diagramming and usage (which have also failed to produce significant differences in writing), and project onward into the impact of modern grammar, frequency of writing, stringency of grading, and the presentation of units on style, rhetoric, logic, and semantics. Frequency of writing alone has been amply demonstrated to have little effect on the quality of composing.[22] Though little research has been done on the impact of units on style, logic, rhetoric, and semantics, it is fairly easy to show that these units represent more learning about writing than learning how to write.[23]

Though innumerable hours have been invested by English teachers, in the correction of compositions, it is questionable whether those hours have actually assisted students to deepen their understanding of the process of composing. All too often the correction process has focused upon deviations from mechanical convention, has failed to respond to the message implicit in the composition itself, and has contributed little or nothing to students' insight into the composing problems they were experiencing. The net impact, then, has been to discourage rather than encourage and motivate further writing, to substitute an irrelevant set of rules for a germaine set of assistances,

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[22]See J. Stephen Sherwin, Op.Cit., pp. 157-168.

[23]James Moffett, "A Structural Curriculum in English", Harvard Educational Review, Vol. XXXVI (Winter, 1966), 20-22.

and to reinforce a conformity in the externals of expression rather than to encourage a more critical experimentation with the internals of expression.

In view of the model presented above, it would appear that we have not been teaching composing at all. If anything, we have been discouraging it. With our focus on the completed whole we have failed to give help on the prerequisite processes. In short, we have not been teaching composition, but something else altogether.

Can Teachers be Taught To Teach Composing?

Whether practicing or prospective teachers, who have been exposed for years to an irrelevant and debilitating approach to composing , can be retrained into a positive and helpful stance is surely questionable. Whether exposure to a different paradigm of composing skills will of itself change their behavior is also questionable. The best antidote to inadequate procedures would seem to be the experiencing of a new orientation. That is, instead of learning about the different orientation, they would need to experience the process itself. Through self-conscious discovery, they might be led to apply their own experience to the way they teach their students. If they merely work harder at the old approaches, it is dubious whether composing can be taught. If they can be led to create the appropriate perceptual and conceptual learning situations and the non-evaluative expressive situations implied by the research and theory herein summarized, it seems possible that they can create a new order of composing skill and a commitment to successful communication.